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# UNH Study Examines Student Alcohol Use And Attitudes

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May 14, 2004

DURHAM, N.H. – Questions ranging from how many nights a week do you party to how many drinks do you typically consume in a week are all part of the 2003 New Hampshire Higher Education Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Survey for the University of New Hampshire. Every two years, the university surveys the attitudes and behaviors of its undergraduate students regarding alcohol, tobacco and other drug use to better inform policies and programs related to student health.

The 2003 study is part of a continuum of activities that have studied and investigated student attitudes and social behavior during the 2003-04 academic year. In September, UNH hosted the nation's first "Student Summit: Promoting Responsible Celebrations" and this was followed by a series of study circles that engaged students, faculty and staff in an examination of alcohol use and culture on campus. In April 2004, the UNH Faculty Senate released a "Report of the UNH Faculty Senate Task Force on Academic Expectations and Student Behavior."

"The study circle recommendations and the 2003 study, while encouraging in noting that the majority of UNH students believe that even occasional alcohol abuse is not acceptable, also points to the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach for responding to those students who engage in high risk alcohol use," observes Mark Rubinstein, vice president for student and academic services.

The study was conducted under the auspices of the Student and Academic Services Assessment Center and UNH Health Services. A representative sampling of students from academic courses yielded 677 responses for an 84 percent rate of response.

The study reveals that almost 84 percent of UNH students have conservative to moderate attitudes about drinking and getting drunk, ranging from believing that drinking is never a good activity to engage in to occasionally being drunk is permissible as long as it does not interfere with academics or other responsibilities. The majority of students (55.8 percent) report that they either party without alcohol or limit their quantity to six or fewer drinks.

Students also engage in protective behaviors for themselves and others in situations involving substance use. For example, 95.4 percent of those surveyed report that they watch over their friends who are consuming alcohol; 94.5 percent report eating a full meal before drinking; and 89.4 percent report using designated drivers.

"The study shows us that a minority of UNH students engage in high risk alcohol consumption,"

notes Kathleen Grace-Bishop, interim director of health services. “However, our goal is to maintain the health of all students so they may reach their academic goals while at UNH. Addressing high risk alcohol consumption behavior is part of our commitment to promoting healthy behaviors that enhance student wellness and build a culture for academic success.”

As part of the university’s long-range plan to reduce high risk alcohol consumption by students, a 14-member Alcohol Planning Group was recently established by President Ann Weaver Hart, Provost Bruce Mallory and Rubinstein to create a comprehensive plan for responding to high-risk alcohol use on campus. The group is co-chaired by Grace-Bishop and James McCarthy, dean of the School of Health and Human Services. The group expects to have a plan ready by late June. The full survey and summary of results is available at: [http://www.unh.edu/student-life/assessment/alcohol\\_drug.htm](http://www.unh.edu/student-life/assessment/alcohol_drug.htm).